

# Clean and Dirty: Playing with Boundaries of Consumer's Safe Havens

Güliz Ger, Bilkent University  
Baskın Yenicioğlu, Bilkent University

## ABSTRACT

The marketplace, with its continuously increasing symbolic nature and infinitely many alternative consumption choices, poses a disorderly and threatening environment for consumers. This conceptual paper discusses the ways in which consumers magically create, eliminate, or shift many boundaries surrounding them through rituals and practices related with cleanliness in order to construct a safe 'home' in an otherwise threatening environment.

Rituals and practices related with cleanliness can be observed in many spheres of everyday social life. We buy products and services to clean our bodies, clothes, and homes. Cleaning products industry continuously introduces "new and improved" products. These products range from basic consumer goods like Colgate toothpastes, Procter and Gamble cleaning agents, and Johnson and Johnson shampoos and bath products, to more high-end designer products like Nilfik's Advance Hip Vacuum Cleaner, Caldrea's Green Tea Patchouli Linen Spray or pure silk cheesecloth dusters, to all natural 'green' products by companies like The Body Shop or Lush. Global detergent producers such as Unilever spend huge amounts of money and time on marketing research to determine the preferred and perceived degree of whiteness and cleanliness in different cultures. Removing dirt is not only an important concern for home and personal care but also for the environment—such as chemical and industrial pollutants. Food products advertise the absence of impure additives and preservatives. Yet, dirt can also become a medium of play for consumers wishing to become part of nature (Belk and Ger forthcoming). These are among the examples that indicate the daily significance of cleanliness in consumption. Yet, to our knowledge, consumer researchers have not studied this topic.

Cleaning practices and rituals are deeply and closely linked with cultural categories and their significations (Ger 1999). Cultural categories, invisible to the social actors, are constantly substantiated so that the world is constructed to conform to the imagined world (McCracken 1999). This substantiation of the social world can be through commodities or practices and rituals of consumption. For example, grooming rituals are not only performed for hygienic reasons, but also as part of a body language and a social communicative action (Rook and Levy 1983). In the market place, where human relationships come to be represented more and more through meanings embedded in goods produced for sale there is massive overproduction of commodity signs. The meanings governing the social world do not only reside in the commodities per se, but are also a matter of practices that make use of the symbolic (Denzin 2001; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Schor and Holt 2000). McCracken (1999) refers to these practices and rituals as social actions aimed at the manipulation of the cultural meanings for the purposes of communication and categorization.

We argue that rituals and practices related to the concepts of clean and dirty have an underlying role in this process of communication and categorization as they obliterate, create, or shift the boundaries of the geo-social maps of individuals. We define the geo-social map as a map of the imagined location of the consumer in the social. Social life is established around boundaries. Through categorization and communication, the consumer places him/herself and others in the geo-social map with respect to the boundaries depicting his/her social life world. The point of departure of our

paper is the work of Douglas (1991). Douglas maintains that the social world has a structure made up of borders and social actors perceive everything according to these schemata. Within this contention dirt is essentially disorder and eliminating it helps organize the environment. Social actors, who have been alienated (Miller 1987) or even deterritorialized (Deleuze and Guattari 1983) through capitalist marketplace dynamics, try to objectify (Miller) or re-territorialize (Deleuze and Guattari) their social relationships through magical rituals and practices. In that process, consumers' practices engage with the meanings of cleanliness in order to locate themselves and others on their geo-social maps, defining a safe haven, whether at home, work or play, in a threatening environment.

Cleanliness and dirt have been argued to be of great historical importance in setting up, obliterating, or shifting boundaries between the savage and the civilized, peasant and bourgeois, and the lower and the upper classes in the Western world during the civilization and industrialization process (Davidoff 1995; Elias 1995; Hoy 1995; Huxley 1986; Ross 1996; Vigarello 1985). The notions of clean and dirty have also been of great importance in Eastern societies. For example, cleanliness plays a key role in Hindu caste relations. The upper castes have been distinguished by an unconditional recognition that they are ritually clean. These distinctions are so radical that sometimes even touching or being seen together is forbidden as the dirty lower caste may contaminate the upper clean castes (e.g., Bergel 1962). Notions of cleanliness also have significance in Islam, which specifies how and when people should clean themselves as well as the rituals of cleaning the deceased before the burial.

In the contemporary disorderly world of cultural meanings, the notions of clean and dirty play an important role in determining the daily consumption practices of the social actor who tries to order his/her social world. Order-making practices and rituals establish consumers' locations in their social maps by making statements about boundaries. Eliminating dirt is a creative effort to re-organize or re-order the social life world to make it conform to an imagined geo-social map.

After providing a brief historical background and clarifying what we mean by "clean" and "dirty", we conceptually explore how consumption practices of clean and dirty negotiate this elusive map and its boundaries. We suggest that boundaries between inside and outside, upper and lower classes, familiar and unfamiliar, and culture and nature appear, disappear and shift through the everyday rituals and practices of 'clean' and 'dirty,' defining a safe haven.

## MEANINGS OF CLEAN AND DIRTY

The first entry in the Webster Dictionary for the word clean is 'free from dirt or pollution' and 'free from contamination or disease.' Other definitions are 'unadulterated, pure' and 'free from flaws;' 'free from moral corruption or sinister connections of any kind' and 'free from offensive treatment of sexual subjects and from the use of obscenity;' and 'free from error or blemish.' Webster defines 'clean' with respect to its antonym. The entries for 'dirty' also follow the same style: 'not clean or pure;' that which 'containing impurities;' 'morally unclean or corrupt;' 'indecent, vulgar;' and 'not clear and bright.' Consistent with the Saussurian notion that language is a system of differences, Webster defines clean and dirty in relation to each other, whereby 'clean' gains meaning only with respect to 'dirty'.

In a pilot study in Turkey we find that when people think about 'clean' and 'dirty' they draw their understandings from two realms: conceptual and material. Conceptual understandings are about abstract and ideological issues such as purity, sacredness, soul, nature, beauty, feelings, love, mind, and the world at large. For example, the notions of the purity of a newborn baby or unconditional love are regarded as 'clean', whereas disturbing the balance of the world and the lack of sensitivity to world issues are interpreted as being 'dirty'. Material understandings, on the other hand, take on a more immediate, every day perspective, such as cleanliness and dirtiness of the body, clothing, food, house, and the environment.

This conceptual/material relationship is also evident in Delaney's (1991) ethnography on family, kinship, and social relations in a Turkish village. Villagers give much greater importance to cleanliness in a conceptual sense (e.g. purity, sacredness) than the cleanliness of their material surroundings, except inside their homes. For example, they consider the road that links their village to the big city to be 'bula?ık' (not clean/pure) as it opens the village up to the dirtiness of the city, while the dusty village roads covered with mud, animal defecation, and garbage are not a concern for cleanliness.

Hence, not only the conceptual and material meanings and experiences of clean and dirty differ with respect to the borders existing in the social realm, they also locate, establish, and obliterate these borders according to different social realms.

### HISTORICAL ROLE OF CLEANLINESS AND DIRTINESS IN SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Cleanliness has been conceptualized as a reflection of the civilization process (Elias 1995; Vigarello 1985). Analyses of the changing attitudes towards cleanliness since the Middle Ages indicate that, as the means of distinction of nobility and the proof of ancestry played a diminishing role, manners became the differentiating element among social classes in modernizing France. Cleanliness, as part of these behaviors and manners, became synonymous with *civilisé*, by which "civil" people wished to designate "the specific quality of their own behavior, and by which they contrasted the refinement of their own social manners, their "standard," to the manners of simpler and socially inferior people" (Elias 1995, p. 32). Therefore, being visible, and expressed as a refinement of behavior, personal space, and of self-discipline, cleanliness became a norm not only of the individual but also of the social, depicting the history of cleanliness as the history of the pressure of civilization on the world of personal space. The authority figures in the perception of cleanliness in the seventeenth century France were not scholars or hygienists, but rather the authors of manuals of etiquette and experts in manners. This displacement of the basis of authority highlights the social communicative function of cleanliness, rather than its individual hygienic functions. The history of cleanliness is thus seen not as a history concerning hygienic practices, but rather as a social history from aristocracy to bourgeoisie, a history of changing structures in social life during the civilization era in France (Vigarello 1985).

Davidoff (1995) who studied the pursuit of and meanings given to cleanliness throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Western Europe maintains that it was not cleanliness per se but the meanings ascribed to cleanliness that were vital, for they realized as well as symbolized the need to establish status through deference, order and ritual. The function of the pursuit of cleanliness, she argues, is to impose order on disorder, to transform the anarchy of raw material into acceptable cultural artifacts, to maintain the boundaries between nature and civilization. During this process of boundary definition and maintenance, patterns of consumption had

been one of the most common markers of status definition (Davidoff 1995).

In the USA, from the pre-Civil War era to the 1950s, the society transformed from 'dreadfully dirty' to 'cleaner than clean'—an obsession with cleanliness (Hoy 1995). Hoy argues that this transformation is based on an assimilation process, the attempts to persuade the masses to become American, rather than a simple care for hygiene. America, in the course of this transition, came to link being clean with being respectable, socially responsible, and healthy. This view also emphasizes the symbolic nature of acts of cleanliness. Taking Vigarello's (1985) accounts on the transition from aristocracy to bourgeoisie a step further, Hoy (1995) suggests that the pursuit of cleanliness was critical in the development of a middle class during the industrialization and urbanization process in the United States. She argues that clean and classy went together in this process and middle-classes differentiated themselves from the lower classes through cleanliness.

Huxley's (1986) essay "Hyperion To A Satyr" illustrates the symbolic importance of cleanliness for class differentiation. Focusing on dirt in the history of human existence and analyzing dirt's effect on creating class barriers, Huxley talks about the need to segregate oneself from others deemed pathetic, smelly, and filthy. Reflecting on a time when, while at the beach, he came across thousands of condoms scattered on the sand, probably coming from a sewer not far away, he flashes back to the times when dirt was a normal and intended part of society. He asserts that the segregation between those who felt they were less stinky and others intensified over time as dirt and stink started to be considered bad and the rich began to wash themselves. This distancing, according to Huxley, started with one substance, dirt; the largest cause of discrimination is argued to be based on the connection in the human mind between dirt and people of a lower social class (Wilson 2001).

As cleanliness became a visible sign of social structures, around 1915, Dadaism emerged as a critical and revolutionary avant-garde movement, trying to destroy these structures. Frankl (1992) argues that the Dadaist cult climaxes in the undoing of "the separation between the clean and the dirty, between those who have freed themselves from anal fixations and avoid contact with dirty matter—the clean and superior people—and those who make themselves dirty, soil themselves in the course of their labors" (p. 172). Dadaists provide a social criticism and seek to obliterate the distinction between the upper and lower classes by breaking down the distinction between the clean and the dirty. As art is often considered 'cleaner' and 'higher' than the rest of the world, Dadaists try to show that art can be just as dirty as, or even dirtier than, the world. In their effort to sweep all divisions away Dadaists blur the boundary between cleanliness and dirtiness (Kuspit 2001). This resembles the medieval rituals of folk carnival which Bakhtin (1965) argues are intentionally grotesque and based on the vulgar body to create a world oppositional to the official one, liberating individuals from the structures of social life.

Practices and meanings of cleanliness are linked not only to social structures within a society but also to international structural relations. Analyzing the modernization process from the point of view of hygiene, Ross (1996) argues that the new cult of cleanliness that the French culture faced after the Second World War is a part of an ideology of consumption that is at work within the process of turning to American-style mass-consumption habits. Similarly, Barthes (1972) maintains that what the French children of the war yearn for—*fringale*—is cleanliness, and what they need is purity. Observations on the symbolic rather than functional cleanliness in decolonializing France suggest that cleanliness also symbolizes being washed of all the stains left behind from colonial times (Ross 1996).

These accounts of academic, literary, and art works indicate that cleanliness and dirtiness are important factors in identity formation, class differentiation, and international social structures—in both bringing people together and dividing them apart. However, the contemporary social structures are very fluid and fuzzy. The unstructured, disorderly social life worlds based on the ever-changing cultural categories demand a way for the consumers to make a clean exit out of this mess.

### MAGICAL RITUALS AND PRACTICES OF CLEAN AND DIRTY IN CONSUMER SOCIETY

Contemporary life consists of discontinuities, pluralities, chaos, instabilities, constant changes, fluidities, and paradoxes in which both symbolic production and consumption are major areas of societal participation (e.g. Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Culture, language, aesthetics, symbolic representations, and literary expressions that are central to the current market dynamics contribute to this fluid disorder. In the contemporary consumer society, “in place of a secure order of values and social positions, there is a bewildering variety and fluidity of values, roles, authorities, symbolic resources, and social encounters” (Slater 1997, p. 83). In this rather disorderly marketplace consumers try to build an orderly and “clean” habitus (Bourdieu 1986) with boundaries and borders establishing their place and the others’ with respect to it. Magical rituals directed at constructing subjective geo-social maps establish social actors as creative consumers, freeing them from the commotion of the disordered marketplace by letting them play with their boundaries. This effort can be described as magical as the social actors try to order the disordered, classify the unclassified, and familiarize the unfamiliar.

Consumers resort to magic when they are faced with inflexible social problems (Arnould, Price and Otnes 1999). Magic, as a practice of power, becomes a practical alternative for consumers when they are creating their social life worlds. These magical rituals establish suitable ways of living with respect to others. Horton (1993) describes magical praxis as the mixture of practical motives and emotional and aesthetic ones. These practical, emotional and aesthetic motives are used to create and recreate the social world around human beings. Arnould et al. (1999) maintain that magical practices thrive in the context of “freely floating signifiers” of the postmodern marketplace as they serve to transform the boundaries of a social actor’s now ‘structured’ world.

Such magical shaping is related to the sacred and profane, a dimension which structures social life (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). Similarly, Douglas (1991) distinguishes between purity and danger in the general social order. Dirt or matter out of place creates a disorder in the social life worlds and thus needs to be purified, ordered, or sacralized (Belk et al. 1989; Douglas 1991). The related distinctions between order and disorder, clean and dirty, and sacred and profane are important structural elements. Through the magical rituals related to the subjective meanings of clean and dirty, the consumer tries to maintain a particular ‘reality,’ which can be defined as his/her geo-social position on the elusive map of social relationships. Ritual behaviors, which are “symbolic expressions through which individuals articulate their social and meta-physical affiliations” (Rook 1984, p.280), communicate what one is and categorize what others are through locating where one stands and placing boundaries relative to others, destroying these boundaries, or shifting them. They are seen to be psychologically complex and intense behaviors aimed at resolving conflicts one faces during everyday social life (Rook, 1985). As Durkheim (1915) argues for sacred rituals, magical rituals and practices of clean and dirty are powerful processes that create particular sacred realities despite

profane threats of the commotion of the contemporary market place.

### VOYAGING THROUGH THE BORDERS

Ritual has been likened to building dams and walls to “keep back the dangers of the unconscious” (Jung 1959, p.22). The unconscious in this view can be extended so as to circumscribe the unknown and the borders are created through rituals to help keep out the dangers of the unknown. Erikson (1982), on the other hand suggests that the fundamental purpose of rituals is to institutionalize or rationalize contradicting behavior. Therefore, taken together, it can be argued that rituals not only create boundaries but also through the processes of institutionalization or rationalization, transcend these boundaries by eliminating or shifting them. In this section we discuss how the magical rituals and practices of cleanliness might create ordered subjective realities within an otherwise unmanageable social world.

#### Upper and Lower Classes

We already discussed how the notions and practices of cleanliness and dirtiness played a significant role during the project of modernization and civilization and the formation of a middle class in the West. Today, a similar concern for cleanliness can be observed in developing societies that are in the process of establishing a middle class. It is interesting that usually the first international companies to go into developing markets such as China, Kazakhstan, and Turkey were those that sell cleaning products, like Unilever and P&G.

In *Lifebuoy Men and Lux Women* (1996), Burke examines the emerging needs for cleanliness during the making of modern Zimbabwe. He focuses on both the post-colonial impacts of global capitalism on the formation of needs for cleanliness and the magical uses of cleaning products—such as soap advertising that claims to make the consumers whiter. In Turkey, dirtiness is associated with poverty and backwardness, while cleanliness represents modern civilization and respectability (Ger 1999). Accordingly, a multinational detergent producer’s research indicates that Turkish consumers’ preferred degree of whiteness is whiter than in many other countries, indicating the extreme importance given to cleanliness. Moreover, rural migrants in Turkish cities are considered to be outside, unfamiliar, and dirty. Although most middle class homes are cleaned by rural migrant maids, the latter are established as being dirty by such practices like reserving for them a separate set of cutlery, glass, and towel, or not letting them cook for the household, thus setting up a boundary. These examples suggest that the practices of cleanliness have significance in societies that are in the process of modernization and establishing their middle classes. Consumers use cleaning and grooming products in order to magically transgress boundaries between lower and upper classes in developing societies, where to be clean symbolizes modernity, civilization, respectability, and a distance from poverty.

However, the use of cleaning products and services for distinction is not limited to developing countries. The upscale British lifestyle magazine *Wallpaper* maintains that it is now fashionable to be seen doing the housework and cleaning has attained a cult status with designer kits and products (Kirwan-Taylor 2003). In this case, it is not cleanliness per se that differentiates, but rather the fragrance of the detergent one uses—citrus mint yling ylang or jasmine lily or green tea patchouli—or how hip the cleaning kit one uses. Furthermore, in more affluent parts of the world, where the use of commodities like soap, detergents, and shampoo, services like hot water and plumbing, and appliances like washing machines and dishwashers are taken for granted, dirt becomes a playground for

consumers. The border this time endures between the upper and lower classes' nature of playing with dirt—the upper classes choose to quietly harmonize with it by skiing or climbing, whereas the lower classes enjoy noisily dominating it with truck races or motorbikes. On the other hand, in less affluent societies dirt remains to be a threat to civility that should be fought with as many cleaning products and utensils as possible (Belk and Ger forthcoming).

### Inside and Outside

Practices and meanings of clean define and are defined by the border between the inside and the outside. This border specifies what one lets in and keeps out. Delaney (1991) finds that this distinction plays a very important role in a Turkish village. The villagers consider the city to be dirty and their village clean, in an abstract sense, as they maintain that their village is 'closed' to the 'polluting' influences from the city, which is open to contamination. Thus, they create an identity for their village and categorize the city as the outside as they establish a border between their clean village and the dirty city. This border becomes evident especially when the villagers mention that the road that links their village to the city is repulsive as it opens up the village (inside) to the impurities of the city (outside). In addition to these moral distinctions between clean and dirty, there is also a more physical boundary: inside versus outside of the home. Although villagers keep their houses very clean, and in the process consume a wide variety of cleaning products, they do not tend to the space outside the home: the dusty village roads and alleys are covered with mud, garbage, old machinery, and animal defecation. Similarly Chapman and Jamal (1997) find that there are different perceptions of inside and outside and of cleanliness and order between English and immigrant Pakistani households living in the same neighborhood. Pakistanis keep their homes clean but not their backyards. Their English neighbors, who see only the backyard but not the indoors, distance themselves from the Pakistanis whom they label as dirty.

In both Delaney's (1991) and Chapman and Jamal's (1997) findings, borders (between the city and the village or inside and outside the home) frame the meanings and experiences of clean and dirty. These meanings are not static; they vary depending on whether one refers to the inside or the outside, in whatever way these spaces are defined. For example, the city is not dirty per se relative to the village in a material sense; but by playing with the word's meaning, villagers are able to magically (the village does not become 'clean' all of a sudden) set an inside/outside border to identify themselves. These different conceptions regarding cleanliness, ordering, and borders show that the meanings given to clean and dirty provide keys to a particular construction of reality and coherence for social life.

### Familiar and Unfamiliar

Another way in which social actors locate themselves and others on their geo-social map is by defining what is familiar and what is not. Through sacralizing rituals and practices of cleanliness one establishes, purges, or shifts boundaries to determine what is familiar or unfamiliar. For example, most people would consider a left over food in a restaurant dirty and would not eat it and summon the waiter to 'clean it up,' although they might take a bite from a friend's or a spouse's sandwich. This does not mean that the friend's sandwich is 'cleaner' than someone else's. However, this practice makes the sandwich magically clean while establishing the friend as familiar. In clothes shopping, many consumers do not hesitate to try the clothes on in the store and do not consider them to be dirty; however, they wash these same clothes before wearing them for the first time after purchase (Co?kuner 2002). This washing ritual,

Co?kuner argues, is a way of appropriating the new garment, making it one's own, and purifying it from alien particles and smell. Similarly, when we first move into a new home, we make it our own by cleaning it, as part of the possession ritual (McCracken 1999).

These rituals are not performed for the sake of cleanliness or hygiene. Instead, they take the person, the new garment, or the new house away from the domain of the unfamiliar and bring them over the border in to the familiar realm, where they are established as a friend, one's own outfit, or home sweet home. Perhaps a more striking example would concern how the bodily fluids of strangers are considered to be dirty and even disgusting, whereas that of the loved one's clean and sensual. The allure of or disgust with bodily fluids classify what is familiar and what is not in social relationships. What is important is not cleanliness per se, but rather how, through a magical ritual or practice, one transcends the meaning of cleanliness in order to locate the border between the familiar and unfamiliar.

### Culture and Nature

Cleanliness has been an indication of the triumph of culture over nature, of civilization over the primitive in a modernist sense (Elias 1995; Vigarello 1985). However, today civilization is also identifiable with dirt—pollution. The boundary between nature and culture and its relationship with cleanliness becomes very apparent in an extreme example. Werner Herzog's documentary film *Ten Thousand Years Older* (2001) depicts the tragic disruption of the nomadic lives of the last unknown indigenous tribe on this planet. After the 1981 encounter between remote Brazilian tribespeople and a camera crew that took the natives from a Stone Age existence to modern times, within months, many in the tribe died of small pox and other diseases, as they did not have an immune system against the diseases of civility. After only a decade, their old way of life completely passed away and their children felt embarrassed by their "savage" parents. Although culture and civilization are associated with cleanliness, although the "civilized" children of the tribe regard their ancestors as dirty savage people, culture and civilization pollute both the culture and the bodies of the natives.

These paradoxes are encountered continuously in everyday social lives. Artists like Tracey Emin, who employs from used tampons and pregnancy test kits to soiled sheets and day-old underwear in her works, and Chris Ofili, known for using elephant dung, by playing with dirt in their artworks, try to draw attention to such paradoxes in the modern. They not only tear down the borders within the art world (high art versus low art), but also criticize the borders within the society between a 'civil' and a 'natural' way of living.

Let's consider some contradictions related to the culture/nature distinction. Some consumers voluntarily choose simple consumption practices so as to preserve a natural way of living and reduce the polluting hazards of civility to the nature by using fewer cleaning products and water, leaving the dishes and clothes 'dirty'. However, the numbers of these consumers are limited and pollution in urban societies is a major problem. Consequently, many urban consumers run from their civilized dirty cities to nature where it is clean and pure. However, the city can also be seen to be 'clean' with its asphalt roads and cemented pavements. One would consider mud or soil in the middle of the city 'dirty,' whereas one might love to lie on the ground in the woods, feeling the livelihood beneath, with the stars as a blanket and sleeping out in the open 'clean' air. Soil per se is not dirty, but it is in the city where it is not nature (-al). After having spent a few days in the pure clean nature, maybe even taking a mud bath, one then returns to the 'dirty' city and runs to the shower, to the favorite shampoo, bath salt, conditioner, and



soap, which were denied during camping. All these instances show that the culture and nature distinction is laden with several paradoxes. Not only the boundary between culture and nature is set and played with through clean and dirty practices and rituals, but also the meanings of clean and dirty change according to the boundary between culture and nature.

### **“HOME” IS WHERE WE ARE SAFE AND AWAY FROM DANGER**

Perhaps the boundary between what is safe versus threatening is the fundamental melting pot of all the discussed distinctions. The above examples involve ways of creating a safe ‘home’ in the face of the threats generated by the commotion of the disorderly world. Let’s consider another example. Children are commonly considered to be clean, innocent, and pure, not contaminated by the dirtiness of the world, even if they have runny noses and smelly diapers. However, homeless children living in the streets are usually considered to be dirty. It is not uncommon in Istanbul to come across a homeless child who has no place to wash. Most people regard these children not only as dirty (dirty per se as well as contaminating their city), but also as threatening. However, as long as these children are contained in the slums of the city where they “belong”, there is no urgent threat for the ‘society.’ Here we also see a convergence of several boundaries—between the slum and the city, in place and out of place, and the boundaries within the society. The various boundaries we discussed relate to the threats we encounter in our daily lives and efforts of sometimes keeping them away by building up walls or sometimes establishing them as safe by transcending those walls.

Social life is becoming more and more commodified through mass production and mass marketing and with the massive overproduction of commodity signs. Social relations are dissolving into relations between commodities and consumption practices (Holt 1997; Taussig 1980). The new reflexive modernization, Beck (1992) argues, creates market dependency in all dimensions of living by the mass consumption of not only commodities, but also opinions, habits, attitudes, and lifestyles. Technological advancements, mass communication technologies, and flows of globalization accentuate this process. The meanings that are ascribed to commodities proliferate and change so rapidly in today’s marketplace that it may not be possible for consumers to control what their social actions communicate. This ever-expanding colonization of social domains by such marketplace symbolism ‘deterritorializes’ the social actor in his/her own territory (Deleuze and Guattari 1983) and delivers them over to an external control and standardization (Beck 1992). The lack of control over one’s own social world creates what Beck (1992) calls the risk society where there exist incalculable, unaccountable, uncompensatable, and unlimited threats for the individual. Therefore, the individual feels anxious, insecure, deterritorialized or out of place—and note that for Douglas (1991) dirt is matter out of place—and alienated or a loss of control over his/her social relationships. In an attempt to re-territorialize and reclaim control over their social life worlds, actors utilize magical rituals and practices. These magical rituals and practices institute a response, a creative moment against the threats of the marketplace as they determine the self, the other, and their respective places in the geo-social map that is (re)ordered through the continuous construction, elimination, and modification of boundaries between what poses a threat and what makes one feel safe. Consumption rituals and practices help consumers create a world of their own, one which is familiar and safe, out of the threatening disorderly material world. Taussig (1980) suggests that such moments of creative resistance create particular social realities through fantasy. These

fantasies of cleanliness are a way of bringing back the social relations that were taken away by commodity fetishism, a way of re-territorialization of the human social life in order to feel at home, in order to feel safe.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

In contemporary societies, where consumers have lost control of their social domains over to marketplace symbolism, they respond by consumer symbolism—they play with the boundaries in their geo-social maps. Magical rituals and practices of cleanliness serve to communicate and categorize themselves and others in order to feel safe and at home. Research about such practices will help us understand how consumers cope with the commotion of consumer society and the paradoxes of this order-creating process.

One fruitful research area would be the relationship between consumers and their brands of cleaning and grooming products. For example, when do people feel the need to clean their body or homes; when do they feel the need to put on make up, or fragrances, and wear clean clothes? It might be that this need arises especially when one invites someone into his or her various boundaries. Most people clean their houses when they invite people over and shower before a date and cleaning and grooming rituals are very important in trying to make a good first impression. Another question is what aspects of different brands and products make consumers feel safe in various threatening breaches of boundaries in social relationships? These questions imply that the brand relationships may be based on anxiety and a feeling of safety rather than love and a historical bond. There are also implications for brand loyalty as this kind of relationship may be connected to fashion and can be manipulated through marketing efforts that play with the notions of safety.

Another research topic relates to a macro issue: the use of cleaning and grooming products leads to global warming, contamination, ozone depletion, and pollution. Thus, while consumers try to construct a safe and orderly haven by cleaning or playing with dirt, they simultaneously create new risks and threats at a macro level, they contribute to the disorder and the risk society (Beck 1992). This paradox is worth studying in order to see how ecological issues fit with the practices and rituals of cleanliness and to explore how meanings of cleanliness and dirt change in personal and environmental domains.

Finally, the festive nature of cleanliness seems to be a worthwhile topic of study. Bakhtin (1965) sees the marketplace to be a space for human festivity betrayed and distorted by the religious, political, and moral hierarchies. What if that marketplace, having become the domain of hegemonic capitalism, is now itself betraying human festivity? If the human festivity is to be turned over to everyday social life worlds of consumers, can magical rituals and practices of cleanliness play a role in this overturn? In other words, is cleaning a festive moment? In the article ‘Cleaning Idols,’ the upscale magazine *Wallpaper* claims that the ritual of cleaning has a deeply calming effect and its end result—order—is surprisingly rejuvenating. Rejuvenation is also what Bakhtin’s carnival brought to social life. How about playing with dirt? Is taking a mud bath or camping out in the nature rejuvenating? If both cleaning your car or taking a shower and taking a mud bath are festive, what do these activities have in common? That is, how do consumers use these playful moments—festivity of carnival, art, chasing of dirt, and mud games—to negotiate the safety of their spaces?

We conceptually explored various issues about the role of consumer rituals and practices of cleanliness in social relations. Research on such issues would provide an interrogation of post-structuralist conceptualizations of social orders and an understand-

ing of the negotiation processes of consumers who are cleaning and re-cleaning and trying to create their own social orders on a daily and even a momentarily basis.

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